

Chapter 6 — Reining It In

Ignorance Is Not Bliss, Getting It Done, Control, Living the Nightmare, What Are We Waiting For?, Resistance to Progress

Ignorance Is Not Bliss

Historically, we humans have employed plenty of effective tactics to rein in our population when necessary. Some methods are kind and gentle, and others not so much. In the kind and gentle category, I would include options such as educating women, providing appropriate health care for women and babies, and providing options for birth control, so that women can control their family sizes. Some of the rougher methods that might be best avoided would include war, genocide, infanticide, or suicide.

Of course, the planet also has ways of controlling overpopulation of species in general to maintain a natural balance between various species, such as food and water shortages leading to death by starvation or dehydration of weaker individuals and ultimately survival of the fittest, as well as, of course, diseases and plagues.

We humans certainly have some decent options to choose from if we want to control our population. We can do it kindly and gently, or we can continue to look the other way, ignore the issue and do nothing about it, and let some harsher natural force take care of it for us. Trust me, any bliss you might have felt while ignoring the situation would go out the window at that point.

If we choose to be proactive about reining in our population, we'll first have to muster the will to do it. That appears to be the hard part.

Getting It Done

In the U.S., we have improved a little bit on our birth rates in recent decades, but we still have a long way to go to make a significant difference in population growth. In 2016, we had the lowest population growth rate since 1937, a rate of 0.7%. However, 0.7% is still an addition of 2.2 million people to the U.S. every year, and nearly half of all U.S. pregnancies are still unplanned,³ which means that 1.1 million unplanned births might have been avoided entirely if the women had access to modern contraceptives.

In developing nations, there are 214 million women who don't want to become pregnant yet aren't using modern contraception. That's 214 million women who are likely to have one or more babies that they don't want, for lack of access to birth control. That's 214 million people added to our planet, who have a fairly high risk of living an unhappy life.

If all those women had a baby in the same year, that alone would account for an increase of 2.7%, which is a lot higher than the actual population growth rate of 0.93%, or 73 million added people per year. Of course, the actual population growth rate is a net growth that accounts for the annual births and death rates, which in 2023 was 134 million births – 61 million deaths = 73 million more people, for a net increase of 0.91%.⁴

Obviously, all the women who are at risk of unwanted pregnancies aren't having babies in the same year, or our population growth rate would be insane. The point is that simply providing these women with the means to avoid unwanted pregnancies with modern contraception would likely take care of runaway population growth without doing too much more about it. This is what I mean by kind and gentle population reduction.

Possible outcomes for our planet under different scenarios:¹

1. Soft landing—A civilization and its planet come smoothly to a new, steady state.
2. Die-off—The planet's environmental conditions degrade and populations drop precipitously, but seem to survive. It's hard to know if a technological civilization could survive losing 70% of its population.
3. Crash—The population continues to rise, the planet heats up, and at some point, the population crashes down to zero. This can even happen after the population changes to a low-impact energy source.

Adam Frank, astrophysicist, University of Rochester

And it's even cheap. It's definitely a helluvalot cheaper to prevent births with contraception than it is to pay for the resulting human. Especially if the woman is ill-equipped to care for them. The average cost of birth control pills is about \$25/month, or \$300/year, while it costs about \$25,000 per year on average in the U.S. to raise a child. And that's in the U.S. world of big pharm price gouging.

In undeveloped countries it costs about \$10.60 per year to prevent a birth, according to the Guttmacher Institute. Think about that: \$10.60 to prevent a birth that is pretty likely to end badly. To avoid yet another stressed and unhappy mother. \$10.60 to avoid an unwanted child who will likely be wanting for food, love, health care, direction, and education. To avoid yet another disgruntled human who will be easy prey for terrorist militant cults and other ugly antisocial behavior. \$10.60 to avoid yet another 5.4 tonnes/year of carbon emissions on our planet. Does that sound like a good deal? A win-win? Um, like, duh.

Targeting unplanned teen birth rates with sensible education makes a huge difference, and teen birth rates are beginning to decline worldwide along with overall birth rates as a result of all the work that's being done by nonprofits and, in some places, governments. It turns out that education goes a long way towards voluntary birth control. It's a proven fact that when women are educated, they delay families until they finish school and start their careers, and when they delay families, they have fewer children. In turn, life is better for mommies because they prevent undue stress on their bodies and give themselves a leg up in setting an empowered course for their lives.

The most immediate benefits that accompany lower fertility are reductions in maternal and infant mortality. Preventing pregnancy in girls who are too young or in women who are too old or have health conditions that make pregnancy and childbirth more dangerous removes the risk to women's lives that pregnancy presents. Spacing births farther apart allows women's bodies time to recover between childbirth and another pregnancy. It also improves infant health outcomes because there's less competition between children for breast milk and other nutritional and health resources.⁶

A key part of the propaganda spewed at the general public by greedy big corps is the myth that a reduction in population would be bad for the economy. Please don't buy this nonsense. They are trying to create doubt about the urgency of population control. While it's true that some reworking is necessary, in reality we simply can't continue forward with unrestrained population growth any more than perpetual capital growth and expect to have a reasonably comfortable planet to live on. We can't have it all, and that's every bit as much a guarantee as death and taxes.

Since the 1970s, Americans have had smaller families on average, which is a good thing. However, some analysts, including Ben Wattenberg, Phillip Longman, and Jonathan Last, have argued that a low birth rate spells economic and social disaster. Please don't get sucked into this narrow-minded, shortsighted thinking. We absolutely must prioritize our planet and our civilization and figure out how to adjust our economy long term to get in balance with our planet. We don't have the luxury of choices anymore.

Jane Goodall, interview in Population Connection, December 2021²

Question: How could we use our amazing human intellect wisely?

Answer: Well, if we are ever going to do that, and I've already said that I think head and heart must work together—now is the time to prove that we can. Because if we don't act wisely now to slow down the heating of the planet and the loss of plant and animal life, it may be too late. We need to come together and solve these existential threats to life on Earth. And to do so, we must solve four great challenges.

1. First, we must alleviate poverty. If you are living in crippling poverty, you will cut down the last tree to grow food. Or fish the last fish because you're desperate to feed your family. In an urban area you will buy the cheapest food – you do not have the luxury of choosing a more ethically produced product.
2. Second, we must reduce the unsustainable lifestyles of the affluent. Let's face it, so many people have way more stuff than they need—or even want.
3. Third, we must eliminate corruption, for without good governance and honest leadership, we cannot work together to solve our enormous social and environmental challenges.
4. Finally, we must face up to the problems caused by growing populations of humans and their livestock. There are over seven billion of us today, and already, in many places, we have used up nature's finite natural resources faster than nature can replenish them. And by 2050 there will apparently be closer to ten billion of us. If we carry on with business as usual, that spells the end of life on Earth as we know it.

The book *A Good Crisis*⁷ provides a counterpoint to this ridiculous “birth dearth” myth. It shows how the U.S. can benefit from population stabilization by ensuring that Americans gain access to better education and healthcare, by preventing teen pregnancy, and by welcoming marginal groups into the workforce. We can foster a healthy economy while protecting our natural resources from unsustainable population growth. Does that sound like common sense? It does to me.

The fallacy of the “birth dearth” is being called out more frequently by experts who have a clue. A great example is “The Declining American Birth Rate Could Actually Be Good for the Economy,” an article by Hillary Hoffower that was originally published by *Business Insider* on May 23, 2021.⁸ Hoffower argues that fewer babies doesn’t have to mean devastation for the U.S. economy, depending on Biden’s success with his infrastructure plans and how the economy would continue to reopen after COVID-19. But it does mean change, and the misguided panic over the declining birth rate is more likely about resistance to the unknown than about looking forward to a reshaped America with smaller families. The declining birth rate is a step into the great unknown, and that could be exciting in a good way. I couldn’t agree more.

“You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you. What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of a difference you want to make.” Jane Goodall

As for worries about Social Security running out of money, that’s easy to fix. If the cap on earnings subject to Social Security tax were eliminated, the Congressional Research Service reports that Social Security would be in good shape through 2085. Lifting this cap would only impact about 5.9% of current American workers with incomes higher than \$168,600/year.⁹ Basically, this cap is yet another right-wing drive to give high-income citizens a better deal than the rest of us, and then try to say that increasing population is necessary to make up the difference. Yeah right. Just more overly rich people trying to slither out of their taxes at the expense of the planet.

Adjustments to Social Security have been made in the past and will no doubt happen in the future. A system that taxes every worker at the same current rate would put the system on solid footing. Think about how capping the income that gets taxed is just another way to unfairly give the wealthy an advantage while kicking down the poor and middle class. Since most of us are in the poor-to-middle-class-range, you’d think we’d be for removing this cap in a big way. The problem, as always, is the brainwashing we receive in the form of propaganda rather than truth, funded by sleazy big corps and the filthy right-wing politicians that they finance to get into office.

In the case of Trump, he will always fight for barriers to birth control because he is funded by smarmy big corps like AT&T, Amazon, Entergy, Exxon-Mobil, Microsoft, and Walmart, who are bent on keeping those customers coming with a continuously increasing population.¹⁰ Another example is Elon Musk, who doesn’t seem to feel that he’s wealthy enough and ultimately wants his customer base to grow forever with increasing population. Clearly too much wealth goes to the heads of some people, which is yet another reason we also have to cap earnings and wealth in order to save our planet. This is why your vote and mine matter big when it comes to not only equity among citizens, but also to saving what we can of our planet and getting in balance. Again, these guys are not religious, just greedy.

Concerns about the economic impacts of lower birth rates may have some level of relevancy, but they are also shortsighted. This is especially true, given that a perpetually expanding global population is simply unsustainable. We are going to have to leverage our human creativity to solve this issue for the benefit of all rather than perpetuate it for the benefit of a few greedy rich. When some government practice seems completely backwards and illogical in terms of actual benefits to the public and to the planet, just follow the money and the answer will be clear.

Control

As mentioned above, it looks to me like we don’t have to really do all that much to get our population under control, we just need to do our part to make birth control available to all women worldwide who don’t want to have children. How hard can that be? Actually, the “worldwide” part might seem a bit daunting when you think about it, and it’s definitely true that you and me acting alone can’t really do much on that unless we want to quit our jobs and head over to India to volunteer for a women’s clinic.

Luckily there are some things we can do from here that are pretty easy. It turns out that there are lots of nonprofits that are dedicated to protecting women’s health, and we’ve already gone over the many benefits of the programs, in terms of protecting

women's health and the health of children with basic medical services. So, the first thing to understand is that these clinics provide a lot of services that help women control their family sizes, in addition to contraceptives, so contraceptives make up just one part of the services. And as for abortion, many clinics provide that also, but typically that's a last resort to terminate an unwanted pregnancy, with preemptive services that prevent unwanted pregnancies a much bigger priority.

When it comes to contraceptives, or birth control, there are many kind and gentle ways to do it, in practice, from condoms to IUDs to shots to birth control pills. Once we've had enough children, we can do something more permanent, like tubal ligation or vasectomy. Hilary and I did a mix of cream and birth control pills until our two sons were 7 and 9 years old, then Hilary had a vasectomy. We figured after I did pills all those years, he could take the big one. The point here is to ensure that all women have options available to them, so they can control their family sizes.

The problem is, many women don't have options. Here in the middle class in the U.S., my husband and I had options readily available that we used to easily control our family size. In an undeveloped country with a huge gap between rich and poor, and corrupt leadership that couldn't care less, access to birth control is often a bit more challenging, if not impossible.

And, despite what the Catholic church tries to teach, abstinence is not a realistic option. Please don't tell me that you think a woman in a third-world country with a hot and bothered husband who is all over her is going to stop him, even if she knows she'll end up with yet another kid she can't feed. It's kind of like being a maid in a hotel room with Kobe Bryant. It's gonna happen. Oh, it's gonna happen.

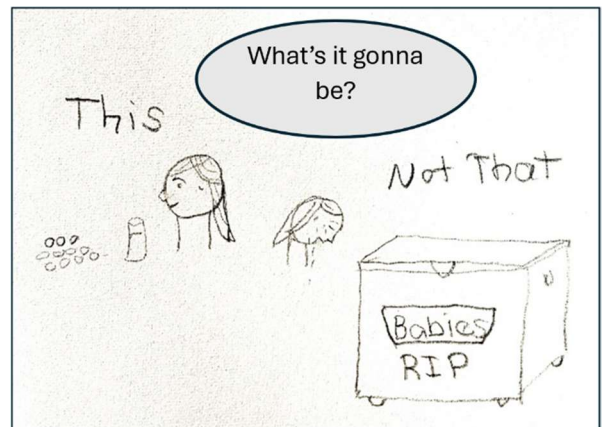
"We know what works, so let's do it: support voluntary family planning," Pape Amadou Gaye, President Emeritus, IntraHealth International

Even here in the U.S.A., not every woman has equal access, which is why we have more than our share of unplanned pregnancies, particularly among teens. Part of it is lack of education in backwards religious communities, where the only education is abstinence, which plain flat-out doesn't work, never has and never will. Basically, the hormones that pretty much control our inborn mission to procreate as a species kick in, and it's just unrealistic to overcome by just saying no. I mean, some Catholic girls might be able to get through this some of the time, but to expect all girls to say no all of the time is just silly.

Yet another barrier is availability. Sadly, we still have ignorant states and regions who seem to think that birth control is not moral, and that it's much more moral to allow unwanted children to be born into this world. As if we don't have enough social problems already. Then there's my personal favorite, where hard right hypocritical religiosity MAGA morons find it necessary to tie together kind and gentle preemptive modern contraception and women's health care with nasty murderous ugly abortion, sometimes with pictures of baby body parts in dumpsters. Seriously? How can these two kinds of options have anything to do with each other? One is kind, gentle and preventive, and the other is a last resort, either to save a woman's life, for horrible cases of rape or incest, or to mitigate the fact that she didn't have access to proper modern family planning options in the first place.

Please don't allow yourself to be duped by this nonsense. It's simply propaganda that is specifically designed to shame and horrify an ignorant audience, to discourage birth control and funding of women's health clinics. Now why on earth, you may ask, would anybody work so hard to convince us that birth control is bad? Well, the only theory I can come up with is to keep the population growing, to keep the customer base for greedy big corps growing. This way, they can keep getting wealthier. It has nothing to do with religion, and everything to do with greed. Doesn't that sound nasty and manipulative? Yeah, I think so too.

Family Planning 2020 Initiative¹¹ is a program that was launched at a London conference in 2012 with the purpose of getting 120 million more women and girls in 69 countries to use contraceptives. Per the United Nations, at least twice that number would like to be able to avoid getting pregnant if they could. Barriers include cost, availability, lack of knowledge, and in some countries, cultural taboos and social pressures that encourage young women to get pregnant. Refugee camps are one of the least safe places in



the world for girls and young women. Contraceptives and access to safe abortions should be treated in these places with the same urgency as water, food, and shelter.

If we can get over all the propaganda and false rhetoric, the simplest thing to reduce our population is to simply provide birth control options to women who don't want to have children. And, to be clear, this means women who don't want to have children quite yet, preferring to delay starting a family, or women who don't want to have any more children because they feel that they have enough kids. These distinctions are important, because a woman may have two children already and not want more. Or she simply doesn't want to start her family yet. It's not about trying to prevent births completely, just ensuring that women have options that are right for them. The point is to give individuals the means to decide rather than constantly putting up barriers to access, and if we can do that, the overall problem of overpopulation will sort itself out just fine.

"Unlike plagues of the dark ages or contemporary diseases we do not yet understand, the modern plague of overpopulation is soluble by means we have discovered and with resources we possess."

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Here are a few ways that individual global citizens can help to get our population under control:

1. Support organizations that provide education, women's health services and family planning services. There are plenty to choose from, and if you can, donating is easy. Any amount is greatly appreciated. If everyone in the U.S. gave \$1 per year, they'd have \$300 million a year, and we'd have this thing whipped in no time.
2. Choose to have two or fewer biological children, especially if you are a U.S. citizen, since we have one of the highest per capita carbon emissions on the planet.
3. When you have the opportunity to vote for legislation to break down barriers to birth control access, please vote in favor. Think about it: what business is it of the government's what a woman chooses to do with her body or how many children she wants?
4. If family planning education in your region is limited to abstinence only, raise hell about it. Hassle your legislators by writing them letters. Pull a group of women together to fight for it. This is called activism, and it's the only thing that creates change. Realistic education of teens that are still in school really makes a huge difference in their lives and in the future of the planet and humanity. Population Connection¹² has an entire playbook for this.
5. Don't get medical insurance from sleazy companies that don't cover contraceptives.
6. Never vote for loser politicians who actively defund women's health clinics in undeveloped countries. These countries are where these services are needed most, and it's our responsibility as a developed country that has modern contraceptives to help those who don't. This is huge, for the good of the entire planet. How do you know where your candidates stand on this issue? Good question. About the best advice I can give is to look at the recent past. Look at their voting records. In the past four decades, every Democratic President has funded women's clinics, and every single republican President from Reagan to Trump has defunded them immediately upon taking office. I shit you not.
7. Don't vote for irresponsible politicians who discourage appropriate family planning education and access to birth control at the state and local levels. They may say they're doing this on religious grounds, but they're not. In reality they're just lying slime bags catering to big corp funding so they can have power that they don't deserve.

Living the Nightmare

There are some really awful places to be born on the globe today, full of unimaginable horrors exacerbated by overpopulation. These nightmares may be far away and easy to ignore from where we are, but they're real, they're happening right now as I write this and as you read it, and people are killing each other over resources and territory. Ignoring this reality won't make it go away. If we let our population growth continue unchecked, we can expect to see more and larger pockets of population-driven

unrest, violence and war. Eventually it will become a global issue and there will be no escape or relief, no matter where you live. It could happen suddenly after a long period of quiet continued growth as we all ignore the problem before it explodes and it's too late. Much like what's already happening with global weather and wildfires.

In countries with above-replacement birthrates, women are having 2 to 7 children, with fertility rates lower where child mortality rates are lower. The sad reality is that women in disease and war-stressed regions tend to have more children because they lose a portion of them, in order to have a few survivors after all the loss.¹³ It's a vicious circle when there are so many people that they're constantly warring over limited territory and resources and fighting poor sanitation.

Why would we not want to make a difference by simply funding clinics and education to help women and provide contraception? Why would we not want to help them improve sanitation, which has been shown to keep girls in school, so they get educated? Why would we not want to give them access to birth control? Educated women don't usually have as many kids and they tend to start their families later, helping mitigate the growth of population. There are some great organizations that are active in this area, Population Connection and Water for People,¹⁴ to name a couple examples. If we can help get these regions into balance, their world will be a better place, and, by extension, our shared world will be better too.

Burundi, one of the most densely populated countries in Africa, has a population of eleven million, and births are estimated at more than five per woman.¹⁵ They have a tradition of handing down family land to future generations. Now they are so overpopulated that there isn't enough land to go around. The vast majority of the population relies on subsistence farming. Brothers are killing brothers and cousins are killing cousins over land. This country has already been through a brutal civil war that lasted twelve years with massive emigration and death of not only humans but also the wildlife. Now there is concern that political and ethnic tensions along with the scarcity of land could push the tensions into more conflict between and within families over the limited, finite land that is available.

Global examples of countries where young women and mothers endure a horrible existence abound.^{16,17} This reality should not be ignored. By supporting the distribution of contraceptives, we help the women, their families, and the planet. Some of us may try to make ourselves feel less guilty about our privilege given the deprivation of those less fortunate by donating money for food and clothes, but these are just superficial bandaides compared to tackling the underlying causes. When entire populations are out of balance with local resources, the most effective actions are to teach the women about population control and provide them with access to the tools they need to plan their families. If we do that, population will drop like a rock and they'll be able to feed their families. It's been proven time and again that it works.

Interestingly, there's a close link between the education of women, access to water and sanitation, and access to birth control that adds up to improvements in the quality of life for everyone in a community in addition to population control. When girls reach puberty, they are more likely to stop going to school if there aren't adequate sanitary facilities. And who can blame them? If sanitation is provided, girls are far more likely to stay in school, and girls who are more educated tend to delay marriage and childbearing so that they ultimately have fewer children. It's a "kind, gentle" means of population control. The opposite being the cold, cruel methods of war, infanticide, brothers killing brothers, disease, and starvation, which mainly impact the young.

"Mass shootings" is defined per the Gun Violence Archive as four or more dead or injured, not including the perpetrator. In the U.S., mass shooting events have increased from 270 in 2014 to more than 600 in 2023. Increased violence is yet another indication of population stress.¹⁸

What Are We Waiting For?

We are gradually getting squeezed out of our rights in the U.S. in ways that start out small and subtle so we get used to it as our population grows. The city of Golden, Colorado, where I live, started charging for parking a few years ago because there are so many people that you can't find a parking spot. Recently, Golden drafted an ordinance that rafting companies and outfitters have to be permitted to run on the Creek.

We're now used to water restrictions, since there's not enough for everybody to use whatever they want, with so many people in a semi-arid region.

So, I ask, why would anyone who values freedom and is annoyed by losing simple freedoms such as these one by one, until we need a permit to breathe the air, vote for conservative politicians who aggressively resist any attempts to rein in population growth? To support the continuous "infinite growth" of capitalism, until we've completely plundered the entire planet of all its resources? Really? Doesn't that feel like a really evil, corrupt, selfish, and unconscionable choice to make? Just the height of selfishness and greed? It certainly feels that way to me.

Population growth will be among the main challenges for development and peace.¹⁹

By 2050:

- Global population is projected to grow 35% in the least peaceful countries compared to a 2% decline in the most peaceful.
- The 40% least peaceful countries will have an additional 1.3 billion people and will be home to more than half of the world's population.
- 80% of the world's population will live in countries that are in the bottom half of the Global Peace Index rankings.
- An estimated 2 billion people currently face moderate or severe food insecurity. By 2050, this figure is expected to increase to 3.5 billion people.
- There is now 60% less fresh water available per person today than there was in the early 1960's. The population is increasing faster than water availability.
- Natural disasters displaced 25 million people in 2019. 8.6 million were displaced by armed conflict.

So, do ya think these stats point to a coming shit show if we don't rein it in? They do to me. And this isn't too far from now. Just a little over 20 years. That'll fly by so fast your head will spin. Hell, I might even still be alive to deal with this. So much for dumping it on future generations.

As if the violence wasn't bad enough, we're even gagging ourselves with our sheer numbers, increasing air pollution in the form of PM2.5 particulates, which is horrible for our health. Dirty air affects nearly all the body's essential systems. It may cause about 20% of all deaths from strokes and coronary artery disease, triggering heart attacks and arrhythmia, congestive heart failure, and high blood pressure. It's linked to lung, bladder, colon, kidney, and stomach cancers, and to childhood leukemia. It harms kids' cognitive development and raises older people's risk of contracting dementia or dying of Parkinson's disease. It's been credibly tied to diabetes, obesity, osteoporosis, decreased fertility, miscarriage, mood disorders, and sleep apnea.²⁰

Pollution has been increasing over time as our population increases, with more of us driving and consuming products made in factories and using electricity from power plants. Our constantly increasing carbon emissions that are increasing global average temperatures are also increasing forest fires that blanket the entire country with smoke that we all

Soylent Green

An Early Warning

Hollywood warned us how ugly an overpopulated future could be in this 1973 film, and they may not be too far off the mark as our population continues to increase. It could get pretty gross.

In a densely overpopulated, starving New York City of the future, NYPD detective Robert Thorn (Charlton Heston) investigates the murder of an executive at rations manufacturer Soylent Corporation, a company that makes a nasty green slop that everybody eats to survive.

He finally figures out what the big corp is trying to hide, and the most famous line in the movie at the end is "Soylent Green is made out of people. They're making our food out of people. Next thing they'll be breeding us like cattle for food. You've gotta tell them."

What is PM2.5 Anyway?

PM2.5 is a category of extremely fine particulates that are less than 2.5 micrometers in size, where a micrometer is 1 millionth of a meter. This is smaller than the thickness of a human hair, and the particulates are easily breathed deep into our lungs, kind of like smoking, only without the cigarette. PM2.5 particulates come from cars, trucks, factories, power plants and wood burning, including forest fires, to name a few examples.

So, it's like we're all getting forced to be smokers, whether we like it or not. And it's not like we can make the smokers stand 50 feet from the entrance; in most cities, these particulates are everywhere and there's no getting away from them.

have to breathe. Lucky us. Of course, if we're sickening ourselves, it only stands to reason that we're also sickening any wildlife that also breathes the air, yet another way we're killing our wildlife. Of course, many of us can get medical help for our ailments, whereas the wildlife simply get sick and die. Because of us.

It turns out that pollution exposure during pregnancy, especially nitrogen oxide from motor vehicles, affects brain development, in addition to increasing risks of other birth defects and childhood leukemia.²¹ So, along with all the other health problems from our own air pollution, we're also likely driving ourselves into a state of idiocracy, and we're doing it to ourselves with our sheer numbers. The filthy air is like a pandemic in slow motion, killing us, our wildlife, and our planet gradually, so we won't notice until we look back. At which point we'll probably be too clueless to connect the dots. How depressing is that?

For what it's worth, it seems that I'm not the only one who's worried. According to a survey a few years ago, 69% of Americans said they feel at least somewhat worried about the climate. 29% said they're very worried, double the rate found in a similar study conducted four years earlier. Britons feel nearly as much anxiety about climate as they do about Brexit.²² Groups like the American Psychological Association have started to take note of the global trend, acknowledging in a 2017 report that some people "are deeply affected by feelings of loss, helplessness and frustration due to their inability to feel like they are making a difference in stopping climate change."²³ An American attorney, David Buckel, tragically went so far as to set himself on fire in 2018 to protest the use of diesel fuels as a global pollutant.²⁴

Threatening information tends to paralyze us humans. Neville Ellis, an environmental scientist at the University of Western Australia, describes climate denial as a way that people cope with eco-fears. In his work with residents of Australia's Wheatbelt, he says, "Some (people) were telling me, 'Look, I can't afford to believe in human-caused climate change because if that's so, then my land is going to turn into a desert and that would be just too sad.'" That's right. Let's just resort to lame apathy that will kill us all and get us nowhere. We'll just tell our grandkids that we couldn't be bothered because it was just too sad to deal with. Think about that. Do you really want to be the loser grandma who couldn't do any better than that?

The fact is, focusing on solving the problem is one of the best ways to deal with stress related to global warming. Do something about it. We'll feel better, and the Earth will heal, at least to a point. But only if we act now.